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# A Child of Nature

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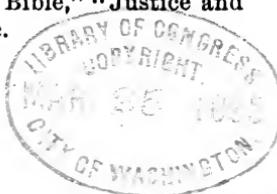
# A CHILD OF NATURE

STUDIES OF THE OUTWARD  
AS RELATED TO THE INWARD LIFE

BY

MARION D. SHUTTER, D.D.,

Author of "Wit and Humor of the Bible," "Justice and  
Mercy," etc., etc.



"In Nature's infinite book of secrecy 14157-a<sup>a</sup>  
A little I can read."

—Shakspere.

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BOSTON

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1895



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TO  
ARNOLD WILKINSON SHUTTER  
THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED BY  
HIS LOVING FATHER.

I am but a part of Thee—  
Like the land, and like the sea—  
Like the burning light of day—  
Like the broad and starry way.  
Good for all is good for me—  
I am but a part of Thee.

As Thou mad'st me, I shall grow ;  
As Thou teachest, I shall know ;  
As Thou givest, I shall keep ;  
As Thou chastenest, I shall weep.  
Guider of the Ocean's flow,  
As Thou mad'st me, I shall grow.

I the part, and Thou the Whole—  
Shall I tremble for my soul ?  
Fear to meet, in realms unknown,  
God the lover of His own ?  
We but seek the same great goal—  
I the part, and Thou the Whole.

Child I am, yet do not fear  
Coming day or coming year ;  
Each brings closer union still  
With the universal Will.

Each to each and All draw near—  
Child I am, yet do not fear.

—*Edmund Noble.*

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## A WAYSIDE PROPHET.

But if God so clothe the grass of the field, which  
to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall  
he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith ?

—Jesus.

Crimson clover I discover  
By the garden gate,  
And the bees around her hover,  
But the robins wait.  
Sing, robins, sing,  
Sing a roundelay ;—  
'Tis the latest flower of Spring,  
Coming with the May.

Crimson clover I discover  
In the open field ;  
Mellow sunlight brooding over,  
All her warmth revealed.  
Sing, robins, sing,  
'Tis no longer May,—  
Fuller bloom doth Summer bring,  
Ripened through delay.

—Dora Read Goodale.

## A WAYSIDE PROPHET.

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MANY of his most important and impressive lessons Jesus drew from the world around him,—from the grass of the field, the lily of the valley, the mustard-bush, the fig-tree, the vine putting forth its tender leaves in the Springtime and proudly bearing its purple clusters in Autumn. He was in profound sympathy with nature. To him every plant and blossom was a revelation of the Father,—a manifestation of the divine beauty and care. He bade men look at the exquisite shapes and infinite variety of color in flowers, and learn the eternal truth that so long as a lily wore her robes of white, or morning dew-drops glittered on the rose, or a bruised reed shook unbroken in the wind, so long

the whole world was folded in the everlasting arms.

“Wondrous truths, and manifold as wondrous,  
God hath written in the stars above ;  
But not less in the bright flowerets under us  
Stands the revelation of his love.”

This is the way I found my wayside prophet. I was going to see a sick person,—and wishing, I am very much afraid, that people would not get so sick as to require a minister when the thermometer was aspiring to a hundred,—when I saw a stalk of red-clover lifting its bright face so cheerfully by the sidewalk that I stopped to look. It never seemed to think of the raging heat, except as it tried to shield the hot sand in which it grew. And that work—casting its little shade—it was doing so bravely, and was looking so bright and happy over it, that it gave my grumbling and reluctant service a gentle but very grave rebuke.

“Your voiceless lips, O flowers, are living preachers,  
Each cup a pulpit, and each bell a book.”

The longer I stopped, the more I became interested in this wayside prophet. Did not God clothe with its green mantle, with its triple leaves, this stalk of red-clover here in Minneapolis, as he clothed the grass of the field upon which our Elder Brother looked in Judea? Is not this plant in the divine line of succession,—one of God's appointed teachers? Was it not his light that shone in its glorious face? Was it not his voice that whispered, "Do your own duty as faithfully and gladly as does the little flower which makes bright this barren spot, and carry into the sick-room as gracious a smile as that with which the clover-blossom greeted you"?

I took my dismissal, for the moment. But on my return I stopped again. One lesson I had already learned; and now I came once more to the feet of my floral philosopher. But where it grew there was too much sun and dust and rattle of street-cars, so I brought

the philosopher home in my button-hole, and continued our conversation in the study.

"Now," I said, "if I had received help from one of my own kind, I should be interested in finding out something about him. The helper must not only bear the gratitude, but must be troubled by the curiosity of the one to whom he ministers. And, although you are a flower, you shall not escape. You have given me a lesson,—now give me your history."

And the clover-blossom, refreshed after its long journey in my button-hole by the glass of water in which I placed it on my study-table,—as if it had been awaiting the opportunity to speak to me,—began:

"In olden times, when people believed that the earth was full of witches and sprites and goblins and demons, they used to wear me for a charm. Sometimes, you know, I have four leaves. Why! did you never look for four-leaved clovers when you were a boy? I'll warrant you did. And when you found one,

did you not think you were lucky? And did not the other boys envy you and try to get it away from you? And did you not hold on to it, and go and hide it in the big family Bible, where you were sure that no one would find it? You need not smile, because you know you never looked into that ponderous book yourself, unless you wanted to see the big wood-cuts that showed how David chopped off the giant's head, or how King Solomon was going to divide a little child in two!

"But I was going to say that people used to fancy that a four-leaved clover was in the shape of a cross, and that it had special virtue for that reason. They thought that anything that looked like a cross must work wonders.

"And not only was I made use of to drive out evil spirits, but to secure all sorts of advantages and blessings. I have sometimes been carried in the pockets of those who wished to be successful at play. Sometimes I

have been slipped under a lover's pillow, to conjure up in visions of the night the form of his beloved. Sometimes a maiden has put me into the shoe of her betrothed when he was setting out on a journey, thinking that I would secure his safe return!

"This may seem strange to you; but do you know that many people use the cross to-day as a sort of charm or amulet? They worship it, because they think that it will bring them some profit in this world and keep off the evils of the next. They have great respect for the cross, because they hope it will prove magical enough to secure them from the penalty of their sins, and take them safely to heaven without much effort upon their part. They never learn the lesson of self-sacrifice and love the cross symbolizes. They never feel that the cross must be erected in their own hearts, and that all their sins must be nailed to it! Yet this is its only virtue!"

I feared that my prophet was getting rather warm; I therefore changed the water in the glass, for cooler.

In a moment, with a pleasant smile, the clover-blossom continued:

"After all, there was something sweet in that old superstition—the idea of using flowers to drive out demons: matching the clover against the cloven hoof. It is wiser to fight the devil with flowers than with fire. 'Bless those that curse you. Do good to those that hate you, and pray for those that spitefully use you and persecute you.' 'Overcome evil with good.' Good is the weapon with which to fight evil. Error is never cured by other error, but by truth. When you wish to drive out a wrong and horrible idea, you must do it with a beautiful idea. Overcome injustice with justice, hatred with love, sin with holiness, darkness with sunshine, thorns with flowers.

"Give young people to know that a bad habit is never conquered till it is conquered

by a good habit—that a vice is mastered only by a virtue. Give the churches to know that the world will never be saved so long as they simply denounce sin; they must proclaim the glory and sublimity of righteousness—and furnish the world with specimens."

Here my little teacher paused. But this was not all it had to tell. In a moment or two its story went on:

"I have been used not only in the interest of superstition, but also of chivalry. At the festivals of the ancient Greeks, favored ones were crowned with wreaths of clover. In later days, I was worn as a badge of honor,—as a token of the divine presence,—upon the falchion arm of many a good knight. There was a ballad made about me, of which I remember these words:

"Woe, woe to the wight who meets the green knight—

Except on his falchion arm  
Spell-proof he bear, like the brave St. Clair,  
The holy Trefoil's charm.'

"You see, it was my mission to inspire the hearts of brave warriors with courage. In the day when they supposed that my three leaves symbolized the Trinity, I made them feel that God was with them. They may have been mistaken about the Trinity,—I suspect *you* would say they were,—but I do not doubt that God, whether three or one, was indeed with them. It does not matter so much—so very much—whether men get the right figure or not; the divine presence does not depend upon a sum in theological arithmetic. If only those people whose ideas about God are all exactly right could call him Father, what a vast orphan-asylum this world would be! I know there are very learned, very good men who would not agree with me, and who would say that you really must work out this sum straight and show that three times one are only one after all, or else you never can be 'saved'; who would require your examination-papers to be absolutely correct in this

problem. . . . I may be wrong when I say 'They are greatly mistaken';—but that's the way a clover-blossom looks at it."

Here my wayside prophet again paused; and, while I waited to see whether it would continue, the suggestion it had made of God's presence recalled to my mind the story of Mungo Park, the great African explorer, who became lost in a desert, and at last in utter despair was about to lie down to die. But his eye caught sight of a tiny plant, revealing great beauty and perfection of parts. He reasoned that God, who took care of such a little perishable plant, would not desert him; and with reviving courage he renewed his journey in safety.

I turned to my clover-blossom, which seemed ready to continue:

"Long ago my connection with knights and warriors ended, but I have never ceased to preach my gospel of God and courage. I used to watch the faces of those who trod the walks by which you found me. I saw many that

looked sad and weary. I gazed into eyes that were red with weeping. I could tell that many of the passers-by were having a hard time in life, and I used to say to them: ‘If God so clothe the grass of the field—if he take such good care of a stalk of red-clover here near the dusty road, sending the rain to wash my leaves when the dust is too thick upon them, sending the sunshine to dry them again,—will he not much more care for you? you who are of more value than an acre of clover-blossoms?’ And then I would sing them this song:

“‘Never go gloomily, man with a mind !  
Hope is a better companion than fear ;  
Providence, ever benignant and kind,  
Gives with a smile what you take with a tear ;  
All will be right,  
Look to the light,—  
Morning is ever the daughter of night ;  
All that was black will be sometime all bright ;  
Cheerily, cheerily then ! cheer up !

“‘Many a foe is a friend in disguise,  
Many a sorrow a blessing most true,

Helping the heart to be happy and wise  
With love ever precious and joys ever new.

Stand in the van !

Strive like a man !

This is the bravest and cleverest plan,  
Trusting in God, while you do what you can ;  
Cheerily, cheerily then ! cheer up ! ”

Here suddenly changing its tone, my prophet said :

“Now, I have told you something of my history—how I was looked upon and what my mission was. Let me ask you a question : Do you know what I stand for to-day ? Do you know anything about the language of flowers ? ”

I replied that I knew a little—a very little—about that vocabulary : not enough, I feared, to satisfy one who spoke the language.

“Very well, then, let me tell you that in the language of flowers the red clover stands for industry.”

(My flower was becoming practical.)

“Yes, I try to lead a life of usefulness, and,

in so doing, I teach others that it is ‘more blessed to give than to receive’—whether time, money, labor, or life itself.

“You have seen me under other circumstances than those of to-day. You have seen me, not standing solitary by the roadside, but growing with countless thousands of my kind in the country fields.

“I wonder, when you came upon me to-day, whether I did not stir some memory of the past. Did I not carry you back to childhood, when a field of blooming clover was a perpetual delight? Did you not see again the paths in which you used to wander? Did I not conjure before your faces long vanished, and bring back the ‘tender grace of a day that is dead’?

“Well, you remember how, as you roamed the fields, the bees came to me and I gave them honey for their hives. Indeed, we used to be called ‘honeystalks.’ Even Shakspere has mentioned us:

“‘I will enchant old Andronicus  
With words more sweet and yet more dangerous  
Than baits to fish or honeystalks to sheep.’

“You remember how the cattle grazed upon me, so that my fragrance was in the milk. When a storm was coming we always gave the farmer notice of it by folding our leaves, and so were called the ‘husbandman’s barometer.’ You know, too, how the mowers came and felled our proud heads; but only that we might furnish food for the herds in winter. And sometimes we were left standing, that we might be ploughed under to fertilize the ground for future crops—thus giving our very life that something else might thrive and prosper.

“Thus, when you consider all that I do for bee and beast and man, you will not wonder that my message is industry, and that I feel entitled to proclaim it to the world. As you look upon me to-day, remember what I do. Fill up your own life with deeds of good.

Teach others that a life of usefulness is a life of honor. Selfishness degrades and dwarfs. Who lives for himself alone is serving a fool.

"I sang you a song of trust a moment ago: I now sing you a song of action:—

"' Say-well is good, but do-well is better,  
Do-well seems spirit, say-well the letter.  
Say-well is godly, and helpeth to please ;  
But do-well lives godly and gives the world ease.  
Say-well to silence sometimes is bound,  
But do-well is free on every ground.  
Say-well has friends, some here, some there,  
Bnt do-well is welcome everywhere.  
By say-well, to many, God's word cleaves,  
But for lack of do-well it often leaves.  
If say-well and do-well were bound in one frame,  
Then all were done, all were won, and gotten  
were gain.'"

Once more there was a moment's pause; but only a moment's. My prophet still spoke:

"You may think I have told you all my history, but there is one item I have kept for the last. Do you know that, as a child

standing on tip-toe and holding a clover-blossom in his hand, the ancients used to represent Hope?

"This is the last thing I have to say to you to-day. You found me in the dust by the road-side, but I tried to lift my head so high that you could see I was looking up to heaven. I wanted you to see that I was thinking of something else than the dust and the heat. I know that if my blossom fades and my leaf withers I shall come forth in the Springtime. The germ of life is not withered by the sun nor blasted by the snow. I shall not die, nor will you.

"This hope sustains me when the wind beats me down; when some clownish foot treads me into the earth. Let it sustain you in all sorrow and misfortune. Shall not the same gracious power that keeps my life preserve yours also? Is there not something in your sacred book—'Behold the tabernacle of

God is with men, and he shall dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God; and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more'?"

And so the clover ended as it began,— the voice of God.



THE JOY IN HARVEST.

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.  
Though he goeth on his way weeping, bearing  
forth the seed,  
He shall come again with joy, bringing his sheaves  
with him. —*Psalms.*

The year goes wrong and tares grow strong,  
Hope starves without a crumb ;  
But God's time is our harvest time,  
And that is sure to come.

—*Lewis J. Bates.*

Sow thy seed and reap in gladness !  
Man himself is all a seed ;  
Hope and hardship, joy and sadness  
Slow the plant to ripeness lead.

—*John Sterling.*

Some day Love shall claim his own,  
Some day Right ascend his throne,  
Some day hidden Truth be known —  
Some day, some sweet day.

—*Lewis J. Bates.*

## THE JOY IN HARVEST.

---

WHEN the year has run its course from the bud of Springtime, through Summer's leaf and blossom, to Autumn's golden grain and purple clusters, we find that its early promise has not been broken. The fields yield their increase. There is food in the land. Over all adverse forces the harvest has been victorious. Its golden banners wave in triumph. "Thou crownest the year with thy goodness."

There are richer harvests than those that spring from the earth, than those represented by shining wheat and waving corn. The harvests of the soul, those that are seen in character, are far more precious than any into which the reaper thrusts his sickle. How

often, too, is the sowing done in tears! how often is the seed, from which these results spring, borne forth with weeping! Yet are we cheered by the hope that the corn and wheat of the spirit shall at last be gathered in joy. So do we

“. . . forecast the years,  
And find in loss a gain to match ;  
And reach a hand through time to catch  
The far-off interest of tears.”

Let us consider two or three parallels between the natural and spiritual harvests:

The harvest is the aim and object of all that goes before—of the various agencies and processes employed.

No one would clear away forests and prepare fields were it not for the crops he expects to raise. To this end every energy is bent; for this purpose every implement is used.

It is so in human life. Results are what we look for; results are what God seeks.

"The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance." These are God's objects in our hearts. This is the harvest toward whose ripening he makes everything contribute. The development of character along ascending lines lies nearest the heart of God. That object he will accomplish whatever agencies of his love may be called into requisition, whatever ages of time or eternity may be demanded.

There may be mentioned, in particular, two or three qualities in human character whose cultivation is suggested by the harvest.

*Benevolence.* The old Hebrew poets beheld God in all things. In the bounties of the earth his own generosity invited them to imitation. A beautiful custom there was in that far-off time—the custom of leaving the corners of the fields, the gleanings after the crop was gathered, the berries on the olive-trees after the first picking—for the poor and the stranger.

In the joy of harvest the needy were not forgotten. No cry of woe jarred with minor chord in the anthem of gladness. Our benevolence may show itself in different ways, but the spirit is one and the same through the ages.

*Patience.* The harvest does not tread upon the heels of the Springtime. "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." The order in the spiritual harvest is the same. We must have patience with ourselves and with others. A man with a hard, rough, intractable disposition has a farm that is hard to till, but it must be brought under cultivation. Let him not become discouraged if his progress be slow. How much of preparation, of hard toil in damp mornings and under sultry noons, must go to the field that is to produce the harvest! How many an acre of fruitful land to-day was once covered with forests, dotted with stumps, rough with stones! What is possible in the outward world is possible within.

John calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved." At first it seems an ebullition of vanity. But look again. Who was John when Jesus called him? A rough, roistering fisherman. What was his disposition after he entered the chosen company? "A son of thunder," an aspirant for a place of honor in the coming kingdom, a vengeful spirit who wished to call down fire from heaven to consume the offending Samaritans. It was not an expression of vanity, but rather of astonishment, that Jesus should have loved such a one as he. And this same John, in later years, became more and more different from all that he had been at first—became so gentle and loving!

Such transformations are seen to-day. The experience of John is not a single incident, from a far-away time. There is nothing exceptional about it. Let no one be discouraged at the obstacles he finds within, nor at those he finds without. No man is

responsible for inheritance, place, condition, any more than the farmer is responsible for swamp, stumps and rocks. But he who wants a harvest must work for it, whether it be in the soil or in the soul; and from all the hard conditions of life power may be wrested.

*Faith.* Every Springtime is a season of faith; every harvest makes the next season's faith more possible. Every seed sown is sown by an act of faith; every head of wheat or ear of corn is an argument for faith. It makes him who sows believe in the outcome—in the harvest.

I do not mean, by faith, an intellectual assent to certain propositions; but a conviction of the sufficiency of righteous principles and their final triumph. A man believes with all his heart in that by which he lives. I do not ask you what you believe about Jesus; but have you faith enough in his spirit and principles to plant them in your own life, trusting that they will bring forth the harvest

you need? This is faith; all else is abstract discussion or barren speculation.

Moreover, have you faith that these same seeds will bring forth a similar harvest for all the universe?

Robert Collyer says: "I used to do a bit of gardening a long while ago, and raise a few flowers; and once I got from a good friend a seed or two of a rare and unique sort, and went to work to raise a wealth of bloom. But the soil was not right, and the sun came too late upon that side of the house, and the fine promise did not come true. Still, one cup flashed forth; and, when all was over and the frosts came, I found a seed or two again in the wreck of my hope, and said, 'I will save these for the new Summer; they are proof that there will be one, if I had no other.' And so when the new Spring came I set them in a richer tilth, and fairer to the sun, and lo! my flowers were the wonder of my garden. . . . It is the

parable," concludes Mr. Collyer, "of the everlasting gospel of God—not a plant in his garden just like another, and no best without a better hanging in the heavens which we must bring down. The soil, how hard it is for some, or how gross; and the sun, how late he comes to some; and the things that stab and sting, how cruel they are to root and stalk in some! and we say: What a blight, what a wreck! But this is God's husbandry as well as ours; and 'All souls are mine,' saith the Lord; and within the saddest frustration there is still a seed to be saved and sown again to the immortal life, in never-failing worlds, for mortal creatures, conquered and secured."

The harvest is not only the object of all that goes before, it also justifies the processes that precede it. The preliminaries, all toil and pain, are to be read in the light that flashes from waving grain and ripened

fruit. No one in the presence of purple clusters and golden sheaves is sorry that he worked and wept. The toil of the ploughman, the weary steps of the sower, are to be regarded, not in themselves, but in their relation to the end of all.

If we may imagine the feelings of a field when it is undergoing preparation for the seed-sowing, we may suppose that the rooting up of stumps, the burning of logs, the ripping of the ploughshare, the iron teeth of the harrow, are anything but pleasant to that piece of ground; but, when the harvest rolls its billows of gold, the field will be satisfied. Everywhere in human life good is born of sorrow; everything worth having costs. Gain is the child of loss, strength comes from the wilderness of temptation. The joyful reaper was the weeping sower. The sheaves that are gathered with rejoicing come from seeds that were watered with tears. But the joy justifies the sorrow. The song of the reaper

justifies the toil and pain of the sower. The harvest in character justifies the severe processes by which it ripened. Suffering, sorrow, loss—these are not to be looked at in themselves; neither are they to be regarded as visitations of divine vengeance; they all belong to those mighty processes by which we are being brought from a state of ignorance and imperfection to loftier and nobler manhood. They are all connected with our moral education and training. By rude and harsh instrumentalities are we made better and more widely useful.

When we are born into this world we are as far away from harmony as an untuned instrument, and God puts us into harmony with the key-note, sounded in his own bosom, very much as the tuner does the instrument. We groan and cry and wail as the piano does, but we are on the way to perfect and joyous strains of music. Pain is educational and disciplinary, inseparable from a state

of ignorance and imperfection; not punitive, retaliatory, vengeful.

“Angel of Pain, I think thy face  
Will be, in all the heavenly place,  
The sweetest face that I shall see;  
The swiftest face to smile on me.  
All other angels faint and tire;  
Joy wearies and forsakes Desire;  
Hope falters, face to face with fate,  
And dies because it cannot wait;  
And Love cuts short each loving day,  
Because fond hearts cannot obey  
That subtlest law which measures bliss  
By what it is content to miss.  
But thou, O loving, faithful Pain—  
Hated, reproached, rejected, slain—  
Dost only closer cling and bless  
In sweeter, stronger steadfastness.  
Dear, patient angel, to thine own  
Thou comest, and art never known  
Till, late, in some lone twilight place,  
The light of thy transfigured face  
Shines sudden out, and, speechless, they  
Know they have walked with God all day.”

Still another parallel suggests itself between the outward and the inward harvest. It is the hope of the harvest that is the inspiration

of the husbandman. Because the sower hopes to reap in joy he is willing to sow in tears. Because he hopes to come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him, he is willing to bear forth the precious seed with weeping.

All that we do must be done in hope. I know how hard and seemingly unproductive are many of the fields in which we labor; but the harvest will come.

In the little poem by Venable, a teacher worn and weary, discouraged by his ill-success, falls asleep over his desk at the close of the day, and sees in vision a church, a senate, a beautiful home. Something familiar there is about preacher, statesman, household divinity; and at last he recognizes in them his own most intractable pupils. By this dream of the future harvest he was cheered.

The familiar poem of Longfellow recurs to us:

“ I shot an arrow into the air ;  
It fell to earth, I knew not where,  
For so swiftly it flew, the sight  
Could not follow it in its flight.

“ I breathed a song into the air ;  
It fell to earth, I knew not where,  
For who has sight so keen and strong  
That it can follow the flight of song ?

“ Long, long afterward, in an oak,  
I found the arrow, still unbroke ;  
And the song, from beginning to end,  
I found again in the heart of a friend.”

Hope makes light our burdens, puts songs under our crosses, plants flowers in the vineyards where we labor. We need to work, it is true, from a sense of duty; because the tasks are laid upon us. But when we labor in hope, as well as under orders, our service will be more effectively and vigorously rendered. We shall do our work all the better if, in breaking the soil and planting the seed, we are cheered by a vision of ripened harvests and gathered sheaves.

Once upon a time (runs an old allegory) certain strong laborers were sent forth by the great king to level a primeval forest, to plough it, sow it and bring to him the harvest. They were stout-hearted and strong, and willing to labor, and much they needed all their strength. One stalwart laborer was named Industry,—consecrated work was his. Patience, with thews of steel, went with him and tired not in the longest days nor under the heaviest labors. To help them, they had Zeal, clothed with ardent and indomitable energy. Side by side there stood his kinsman, Self-denial, and his friend Importunity. They all went forth to their labor, and they took, to cheer them in their toils, their well-beloved sister Hope. It was well they did, for ere the work was done they needed the music of her consolation. The forest trees were huge, and demanded many sturdy blows of the axe. One by one the giant forest-kings were overthrown, but the labor was immense and

incessant. At night, when they went to their rest, as they crossed their threshold, Patience and Self-denial would be encouraged by the sweet voice of Hope singing, "God will bless us, even our God will bless us." They felled the lofty trees to the music of that strain. They cleared the acres one by one. They tore from their sockets the huge roots. They delved in the soil, and sowed the corn, often much discouraged, but still held to their work by silver chains and golden fetters, while Hope chanted, "God will bless us, even our God will bless us." They never could refrain from service, for Hope never could refrain from song. They were ashamed to be discouraged, they were shocked to be despairing, for still the voice rang clearly out at noon and eventide: "God will bless us, even our God will bless us."

You know the parable, you recognize the voice. God will bless us—for his work is our work and our work is his. We are

laborers in his fields, and he is looking for the harvest! A glorious one it will be!

What is there in a grain of wheat? Many a one would say, "It is too small to consider." But why? Behold it. I see in that grain of wheat something that has turned the wilderness into a fruitful plain; that has led the march of empire westward. I see a thousand fields where hundreds of men are at work. I see the scythe and sickle giving way to the improved machinery of modern times. I see in that little grain of wheat something that has created the great railway-lines of the West and Northwest. I see gigantic mills rising. I see the white wings of the ships that bear the product of those mills across the seas to other continents. I see in that grain of wheat the hope of nations on whom the spectral form of famine glares, the loaf that shall drive hunger from the world. This is the vision that rises before us as we look at the tiny grain.

And more than this the great God sees in every human soul.

"But what of those," do you ask, "who perish in ignorance; in their undeveloped, unripe state?" Is not God lord of all worlds? Does he look for the whole of his harvest in one little patch? When we speak of the possibilities of the future, we are not, of course, in the region of the demonstrable; but we may judge from the past, we may draw inferences from the present. And, so judging, the future development of the most unripe spirit will be marvelous above all that we can think. When this body, which to many is a veritable body of death,—seat of strong passions, and of appetites often morbid and inherited, which constantly tempt to sin,—shall have been cast aside; when the greater light of the other world shall dawn; when the hampering conditions, into which many are born here, shall have disappeared,—who shall measure the possible harvest of the spirit?

Who shall compute the results in character  
and achievement for the lowliest of earth?  
In the hope of such a harvest for all souls,  
let us labor.

“It groweth here with toil and care,  
But the harvest time of love is there.”

## MONUMENTS OF THE LEAVES.

As the days of a tree shall be the days of my people ; and my chosen shall long enjoy the works of their hands. They shall not labor in vain nor bring forth for calamity.

*—Isaiah.*

Pleasures lie thickest where no pleasures seem ;  
There's not a leaf that falls upon the ground  
But holds some joy of silence or of sound,  
Some sprite begotten of a summer dream.

*—Blanchard.*

All is concentrated in a life intense,  
Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,  
But hath a part of being.

*—Byron.*

## MONUMENTS OF THE LEAVES.

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I KNOW not why writers or preachers should ever sound a mournful note. People have burdens enough to bear without having additional ones laid upon them by the book or paper they take up, or by the Sunday sermon. The business man who, over the printed page, or in his pew on Sunday, finds himself calculating how to meet obligations that run into thousands when he has only hundreds in the bank, needs nothing to deepen the shadows about him. The woman who gets a spare hour from her household cares, who is anxious how to feed several hungry little mouths and keep worn garments in proper repair, does not need to be told that life is a vale of tears. Her

tears fall full often. Enough of gloom men and women know without telling. It is for the author and preacher to throw into the sad and perplexed lives of those for whom they labor a ray of gladness and hope, to pluck the thorns and gild the clouds, to hold before the struggling and tempted an ideal of strength and victory.

The autumn season is suggestive of melancholy to certain minds, when they look upon the forests and behold only brown masses of shriveled foliage where the banners of Summer had waved so proudly; when they see trees, without even a withered leaf, stand desolate, their black tracery of branches against the yellow evening sky.

But, courage and joy, despite the landscape! The leaves that have fallen—giving people no end of trouble over their lawns; nestling along the walks or lying rotting upon wayside pools—come to us with even a higher message than they did in Springtime. How

glad we were to see them, when they came forth in their freshness and beauty! Now, "none so poor to do them reverence." But, even as they lie dishonored under our feet, we shall do well to become their disciples. The evangel they bring us is not that "we all do fade as a leaf," but that, before we fade as the leaf, we must work as did the leaf, patiently and lovingly, to accomplish something whereby men shall remember us after we have faded and fallen from the tree of life.

If you go out after a shower you will find upon the stone-walks the shapes of the leaves that lie there imprinted in dust. The outline and entire framework are distinct. But that impression will be washed away and forgotten: the leaves have more important and lasting memorials.

"If ever in Autumn," says Ruskin, "a pensiveness falls upon us as the leaves drift by in their fading, may we not wisely look

up in hope to their mighty monuments? Behold how fair, how far prolonged in arch and aisle, the avenues of the valleys, the fringes of the hills. So stately, so eternal; the joy of man, the comfort of all living creatures, the glory of the earth,—they are but the monuments of these poor leaves that fit faintly past us to die. Let them not pass without our understanding their last counsel and example; that we also, careless of monument by the grave, may build it in the world — monument by which men may be taught to remember, not where we died, but where we lived." Really, there is nothing more melancholy in a tree, stripped of its leaves, than in a completed building after the scaffolding has been torn down and the workmen have departed. When the leaves take on their last bright hues and flee away, the work of the year has been accomplished.

Isaiah says: "As the days of a tree shall be the days of my people; and my chosen

shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for calamity." They shall work as fruitfully as the leaves, and the results of their labors shall stand as a tree, living from generation to generation. There is no gloom in that message. It bids the toiler look up and be of good cheer. The purple haze of Autumn becomes mellow with golden light.

Driving through the woods a few days ago, I questioned as closely as I might the few remaining bits of foliage, to learn the secret of their work; how such tiny things could rear such stately pillars. I asked of all—of the almost triangular leaves of the birch, the slender ones of the willow, those of the maple, broad and palm-shaped, and the strong, deeply cleft leaves of the oak—how they wrought. They gave me hints that we all may well observe. The methods of nature are best for man. Let him look where the Divine Will freely expresses itself,

unhindered by the human, and find his highest suggestions.

The first lesson the leaves gave me was this: they work unitedly.

There is no schism or discord among them. They do not quarrel and break up into antagonistic parties. They work for one object,—the upbuilding of the tree. Man takes the result of their work, and turns it into spear-handle and gun-stock; but no weapon of destruction is used by builder-leaf upon its fellow-builder. They work together, each one in its place, and by their combined efforts the tree is lifted, upon broader foundations, into larger areas of shade.

How they throw contempt upon our petty strifes, and teach us that, in the world's mighty work, we should stand shoulder to shoulder; that life is too short and too precious to allow creeds and parties to keep us asunder, while the cry of humanity,

struggling for light and dying in darkness,  
reaches our ears !

How much force is expended in vain controversy that might be given to beneficent work ! The world is not so rich in moral resources that it can afford to cast aside the slightest contribution. Whether that contribution comes from Catholic or Protestant, from orthodox or liberal, from him who is inside the church or from him who is outside, it ought to be gratefully accepted and used. United effort builds the tree. Upon the branches of the forest they are not "evangelical" or "heretical." No leaf despises its fellow-leaf. They rejoice together, and teach us that the true creed for men is that of the loving heart and willing hand.

"Think truly, and thy thought  
Shall the world's famine feed ;  
Speak truly, and thy word  
Shall be a fruitful seed ;  
Live truly, and thy life shall be  
A great and noble creed."

Working thus together, the labor of no single leaf is lost. Each counts for something. No matter when it falls from the tree, it has not wrought in vain.

There are multitudes of discouraged souls in this world who toil and feel that their labor is naught. They are common workmen, in field or upon stately edifices; they are faded and overworked women in the household, whose monotonous round of duties is never broken by an hour's pleasure; they are children whose busy hands carry the dinner-pail to father, or rock the cradle for mother. They live in obscurity and die unnoticed. But the world is richer for their work. He without whose knowledge no sparrow falls to the ground, who notes the course of every falling leaf, sees to it that no honest toil of human life, however hard and homely, is wasted. Man judges by the magnitude of outward achievement. God puts his measure about the heart.

The tiniest leaflet helps the tree. So the tiniest leaflet that falls from the tree of life has done its work.

What was the value of your baby's existence — the little one who opened his wondering eyes for a moment to close them forever? Was its value nothing? No heart is quite the same after a baby has come and gone. The dainty fingers so twine themselves about your affection that when death tears them away it seems as if your very soul were rent. But all is not pain and desolation. The rod that smites, like the rod in Horeb, opens a fountain in the rock. That little life has subdued the temper of your own; has made you more gentle and patient and loving. Its innocence has made you pure, its weakness has tamed your rude strength and made you more tender. The dear face that you see by day and by night beckons you into paths of righteousness and peace. Yea, though you walk through the valley of the shadow of

death, you will fear no evil; for, lo! the little feet of your child have tracked the dark pathway with glory. So the tiniest leaflet does its work.

Another lesson the leaves whispered, as I talked with them that afternoon: they work unselfishly.

Their unselfishness is shown in their respect for the rights of other leaves. They may know nothing about the Golden Rule, but they observe it better than men do.

“You shall find,” says Ruskin, “the gentle law of respect and room for each other truly observed by the leaves in such broken way as they can manage it; but in the nation, we find every one scrambling for his neighbor’s place.” The leaves do not grow as they would like to, perhaps, in all cases. They do not go forward till they run against other leaves, and fight till they displace them, or, being conquered, turn sulkily back. They anticipate each other’s growth, and adjust

themselves to it. The shadow of a leaf above causes the one below to change its position for the better advantage of all—so sensitive are they to the rights of others, to the interests of all. They have no disputes as between labor and capital, and do not trouble themselves about monopolies. Looking upon the leaves drifting past in the autumn gusts, we may remember that one of their lessons was, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

The pine is usually supposed to be inhospitable. But one summer afternoon, lying in a certain grove, I looked up and saw that the pines and the maples got on very lovingly together. The pines did not crowd the maple-branches, but gave their spreading foliage all the room they needed, and, themselves, grew straight and bare until they had shot up beyond the maple-boughs, when they put forth their tufts of endless green.

The “unselfishness” of leaves is shown not

only in their respect for each other, but also in their devotion to the life of the tree. Their business is to minister to the wants of the trunk and branches upon which they grow—to provide food. They get it from the sun and air, and where the sun and air are to be had there the leaves must find their way. They do not think of themselves. They may not be keeping their own symmetry and beauty; but they are faithful to their trust. Somehow they act upon the Master's lesson better than do many of humankind who claim to be his disciples: "The Son of Man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister."

Moreover, they have a care for the future of the tree. There are some oak-twigs lying upon my desk as I write. I break off some of the leaves. At the base of each stem, in its little downy cradle, lies a bud that would next year be a leaf. Indeed, upon some of the oaks, the old leaves remain through the

snows and blasts of Winter, to protect these delicate buds; then fall, unmurmuringly, when their presence is no longer needed. They are willing to die and be forgotten if the work to which they gave themselves may be carried on.

What lesson more than this, of unselfishness, do we need in our jealousies and strifes, in our self-seeking and feverish ambitions? No autumn season will be in vain if we learn from its bits of rustling brown foliage that others have rights as well as ourselves, that the life of generous service to our fellow-men is the greatest and noblest to which we can aspire.

Something else the leaves taught me, that men do not often think of: they work silently.

How mighty are some of these trees! How lofty they grow. How great their circumference. There are trees that from their highest branches would cast a shadow

upon the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral; that would wave above the top of the great pyramid. Yet how silently they grew! The leaves that wrought these marvels of magnitude and strength did their work without sound of trowel or shout of exultation. Men expect to bring about great results by violence and noise. They think that vehemence and bluster count for much, that effectiveness is measured by capacity of lung and contortion of muscle. They forget the lesson of Solomon, "The words of a wise man heard in quiet are more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools." Gentleness is power; wisdom needs no brawling mob to enforce its mandates.

Carlyle says: "Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together, that at length they may emerge, full-formed and majestic, into the daylight of life which they are thenceforward to rule. Not William the Silent only, but all the considerable men I have known, and the most undiplomatic

and strategic of these, forbore to babble of what they were creating and projecting. Nay, in thine own mean perplexities do thou thyself but hold thy tongue for one day,—on the morrow how much clearer are thy purposes and duties; what wreck and rubbish have these mute workmen within thee swept away, when intrusive noises were shut out."

A final lesson the leaves taught me: they work reverently.

The tendency of our times is to question all that went before us—to regard the work of other generations as naught. Every noble monument of religion, literature, art, has been tarnished by sacrilegious touch. Without worshiping the achievements of the past, we yet cannot disconnect ourselves from them and work to any purpose. The divine plan which underlies all our human plans, which unifies all human effort, binds us to the best and most enduring deeds that our fathers have wrought, as the tree unites the work of

the last leaf that fell with the first that budded. We cannot dig down and lay new foundations ignoring all that has been; he who casts aside the principles developed by honest toilers in the course of ages, thinking to build for himself a structure entirely new, may look to have nothing but regrets for his pains. Each one to-day may make a fresh contribution to what has been done in any department, but let him give himself to the task of addition and not of destruction. No doubt the work of every generation contains much that is perishable, but this will drop off and be forgotten, leaving at last only that which is of permanent value.

The great master of art and nature from whom we have already quoted tells us: "We who live for ourselves, and neither know how to use nor keep the work of past time, may humbly learn—as from the ant, foresight—from the leaf, reverence. The power of every great people, as of every living tree, depends

on its not effacing, but confirming and concluding, the labors of its ancestors."

Thus have I read the lessons of the leaves,—lessons of unison, of unselfishness, of silent faithfulness, of reverence. Is there not inspiration for us all in the suggestions furnished? Fidelity counts for more than success; loving purpose for more than the mighty arm. And through faithfulness each one of us may build monuments more beautiful and lasting than those created in the forests by the scattered workmen that, when their toil is done, strew the fields and walks.

Let us rejoice, then, in the Autumn-time! No longer a season of gloom and melancholy, it shall fill us with enthusiasm and resolution. It is not the period of universal death and decay, but of active preparation for the Spring and Summer. We may look across the shrouds of snow that enfold the earth in Winter, and see the buds of a new Spring,

the blossoms of a new Summer. So, beyond the time when the leaves drop from the tree of human life, there is a sphere of gladness and beauty of which it is written, "Though the earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." It is there that the life-structure we raise shall find completeness and symmetry.

THE MISSION OF THE SNOW-  
FLAKE.

How beautiful it was, falling so silently, all day long, all night long, on the mountains, on the meadows, on the roofs of the living, on the graves of the dead !

*—Longfellow.*

So, sifted through the winds that blow,  
Down comes the soft and silent snow,  
White petals from the flowers that grow  
In the cold atmosphere.

These starry blossoms, pure and white,  
Soft falling, falling through the night,  
Have draped the woods and mere.

*—Geo. W. Bungay.*

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean,  
Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

*—Psalmist.*

## THE MISSION OF THE SNOW- FLAKE.

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WHETHER the events of life are what we call special providences may be questioned. Whether the events of life, adverse or favorable, ought to be improved; whether they may, if we apply ourselves to learn, teach us useful lessons and be made to enter into life's discipline and instruction, does not admit of dispute. I do not affirm that everything that happens is directly or purposely sent for our good, on the one hand, or in judgment upon us, on the other. I do affirm that out of everything which happens we may extract good, if we seek it. The worst and unsightliest thing which comes to us has

its evangel, as the ugliest toad is fabled to have a jewel in its preposterous head.

In particular, whether this snow-storm, during the continuance of which I write, was sent on purpose to furnish me a theme may very well be doubted; but, given the snow-storm, it shall read us a message.

I have stood at my window and watched it, looking out upon the storm as the flakes were whirled by the wind among the dark and barren branches of the trees along the street. I watched, as slowly the snow gathered upon walks and streets and roofs of houses, until

“The poorest twig on the elm-tree  
Was ridged inch-deep with pearl.”

And it has all seemed a pure white page of the gospel, fresh from God. “He saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth.” Surely it is charged with some message from the wise and loving Power that encircles the earth.

"Fire and hail, snow and vapor, storm and wind, fulfil his will."

He who is represented as speaking from the cloud and whirlwind, asks Job, "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?" Perhaps the writer meant to ask whether Job had wisdom enough to find out the secret storehouses from which the snow came. But we may ask, Hast thou discovered the wealth of meaning in its flakes? Hast thou discovered the lessons that they teach? Hast thou entered into *these* treasures of the snow?

The snow-storm is a revelation of the divine. There is in it a sweeter theology than that of Augustine and Calvin, and something higher than a bread and butter morality.

Old prophets and teachers did not fear to read Nature face to face, nor did they fail to find there the Life that animated all. They did not feel that they were getting away from God when they stood enraptured among

his works. Nay, their hearts were stirred more deeply, and they struck from their harps more triumphant chords, when they beheld his great and manifold works, and knew that “in wisdom he had made them all.”

The Psalmist looked out as the dainty flakes fluttered through the still air of Judea, and sang, “He giveth snow like wool,”—so soft and fleecy was it, so gently did it fall, robing the valley in dazzling garments and setting a crown of light upon the sacred hill!

“As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven,” exclaimed Isaiah, “and return not thither, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth.”

Jeremiah drew instruction for the people from the “snows of Lebanon,” and some of

the Proverbs came from a similar source. "As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him; for he refresheth the soul of his masters." There is this other also, not quite so complimentary to its subject: "As snow in Summer and as rain in harvest, so honor is not seemly for a fool." (It is very much out of place; and yet he sometimes gets the honor—even from wise men.)

Modern poets and prophets also have found inspiration in the flying flakes and drifted banks. Emerson has a description of the storm's arrival, "Announced by all the trumpets of the sky." We cannot forget the pictures in Whittier's well-known poem, for we all have seen the realities. Who does not know how

"The old familiar sights of ours  
Took marvelous shapes; strange domes and towers  
Rose up where sty and corn-crib stood,  
Or garden-wall, or belt of wood;  
A smooth white mound the brush-pile showed,

A fenceless drift what once was road ;  
The bridle-post an old man sat  
With loose-flung coat and high-cocked hat ;  
The well-curb had a Chinese roof ;  
And even the long sweep, high aloof,  
In its slant splendor, seemed to tell  
Of Pisa's leaning miracle"??

Bryant, in his "Winter Piece," has sung of the "clouds that from their still skirts had shaken down on earth the feathery snow, and all was white." The exquisite poem by Lowell, the "First Snow-fall," recalling a great sorrow, teaches a lesson of patience and trust :

"I stood and watched by the window  
    The noiseless work of the sky,  
And the sudden flurries of snow-birds,  
    Like brown leaves whirling by.

"I thought of a mound in sweet Auburn,  
    Where a little head-stone stood ;  
How the flakes were folding it gently  
    As did robins the babes in the wood !

"Up spoke our own little Mabel,  
    Saying, 'Father, who makes it snow ?'

And I told of the good All-Father  
Who cares for us here below.

“Again I looked at the snow-fall,  
And thought of the leaden sky  
That arched our first great sorrow,  
When the mound was heaped so high.

“I remember the gradual patience  
That fell from that cloud like snow,  
Flake by flake, healing and hiding  
The scar of our deep-plunged woe.

“And again to the child I whispered,  
‘The snow that husheth all,  
Darling, the merciful Father  
Alone can make it fall.’ ”

“What is Nature ?” demands Carlyle. “Art thou not the living garment of God? O heavens, is it, in very deed, He, then, that ever speaks through thee; that lives and loves in thee, that lives and loves in me? Sweeter than day-spring to the ship-wrecked in Nova Zembla; ah, like the mother’s voice to her little child that strays bewildered, weeping, in unknown tumults; like soft

streamings of celestial music to my too exasperated heart, came that evangel. The universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres; but God-like and my Father's!"

We sometimes forget that God is anywhere but in the Springtime and Summer; that he shows himself in aught save the grass of the field and the lily of the valley. But, after all, a snow-flake is as wonderful and beautiful a thing as a rose. Marvelously is each flake fashioned into stellar shape, shooting out its rays alive with the glory of Him who lighted the stars overhead. What variety of form and detail based upon this general type! No two alike! God never repeats himself in a snow-flake any more than he does in a man. How infinite his resources! How varied his productions! There is uniformity in nature, but no monotony.

What immense power and skill are exhibited in a snow-storm! If, as recent calculations

seem to show, a foot of snow is equal in weight to an inch of rain, a foot of snow falling upon an area of one square mile would weigh sixty-four thousand tons. Multiply by the extent of any given storm, and how enormous the weight! Yet this tremendous mass was first lifted up in the form of vapor by the sun, deftly builded and carved into wonderful and beautiful shapes by the architects and sculptors of the atmosphere, and let down again to earth so gently that there was no shock or disturbance. Truly, God is here manifested. Every snow-flake declares his glory and shows forth his handiwork. It does not seem presumptuous to project into Winter the lesson that Jesus taught when he said, "If God so clothe the grass of the field."

The grass of the field is gone. But here is this feathery tuft of snow,—if God so carefully and skilfully fashion this, if he sees that no atom is wanting to its perfection,

how much more hath he planned for you, O ye of little faith! “Not a sparrow falleth without your Father,” said Jesus. Truly; but the birds of the air have flown. The same Power, however, guides upon its appointed path, through all the mazes of the storm, amid all the countless hosts that fly about it, each separate particle of snow. The same Father who cares for the sparrow directs the snow-flake; and shall he not guide thee in safety, and bring thee at last to thy rest in his bosom,—thou who art of more value than many sparrows, of more value than a sky-full of snow-flakes?

“He saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth.” To what end? “There is no such thing in nature as bad weather,” says a Scotch poet. And Coleridge adds, “In nature there is nothing melancholy.” To what end, then, the snow?

Accumulating on the tops of high mountains during the months of Winter, it is preparing

to make more tolerable the burning Summers of many a land. The breezes that in those seasons sweep over the mountains gather from eternal snows moisture for consuming vegetation and coolness for the fevered brow of man. Here, too, are the sources of many a stream that waters the earth. The fountains from which they flow are forever kept full by the melting snow. One Summer, as we sat upon the hill behind the little town of Altdorf, looking across the valley of the Reuss at the Alps beyond, high above the other peaks rose, brown and bald, the summits that were covered with eternal snow. Upon those stern and gloomy peaks no vegetation grows. They are never furrowed by the share of the ploughman or vexed by the reaper's sickle. They have no tree or grass or blossom; and I fancy that a feeling of sadness sometimes comes over them, when they think that no bright colors or golden grain will ever adorn them. But they nobly

do what they can. They gather and hold the snow, and send it down in cooling streams to the valleys, making all vegetation possible, giving life to the trees and grasses and flowers below. The smiles of Spring and the gladness of Summer and the glory of Autumn unite in thanksgiving to the snow.

In severe climates the rigors of Winter are rendered less terrible by the snows it brings with it. They wrap the plants in their soft, warm mantles, and protect them from the frost. They afford in those climates shelter to certain animals who bury themselves in the drifts till Spring calls them forth. Even in more temperate zones the presence of snow is a most valuable safeguard to vegetation, "pulverizing and moistening the ground, and affording warmth where it is much needed."

But there are other uses. "I think better of snow-storms," says Prescott, "since I find that, though they keep a man's body in-doors, they bring his mind out." It has also been

urged that, while the land is more fruitful as you approach the tropics, what is taken out of the land is put into the man as you touch the snow. A study of the conditions in which man is placed upon this planet will show us that zones of perpetual Summer are not the ones most favorable to intellectual life or to development of the stronger qualities of manhood. The Temperate Zone, in which Winter is added to the seasons, is the one in which the best mental work is accomplished and the strongest characters built. It needs a dash of cold in the air, a flurry of snow in the atmosphere, to quicken the intellect.

But there are other uses, and perhaps higher. We merge the material and mental into the moral. From whatever point we start, we must come to this at last.

As I watched, there was the snow coming down. Yes, "He giveth snow like wool." Gradually the streets and walks of the city were hidden, the dust was settled at last, and

every unsightly thing gently and tenderly covered up, reminding of that charity which covereth a multitude of sins, which strives to hide the defects and faults of its object. Symbol is it of an earth-wide love, that folds this sad and sinful world in its pitying arms!

We think of that pathetic prayer of David,— poor David, who had sinned so grievously and suffered so deeply: “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow!” Was it the immaculate whiteness that spake to his conscience and reminded him of his lost innocence? We know not; but it may bring this lesson to us. Remembering to-day our sins and transgressions, ashamed of the stains iniquity has left upon our souls, who of us may not fittingly take this prayer upon his lips and cry, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow”?

A broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, are the sacrifices of God.

“ Gentle as Charity,  
Emblem of Purity,  
Coming from heaven, whence all blessings flow !  
Would we were like thee !  
Then would burn brightly  
The love-fires that set every heart in a glow.

“ Then would the crosses,  
The sorrows and losses,  
That vex us so sorely through life as we go,  
Change to such lightness,  
Such beauty and brightness,  
As makes thee so charming, thou beautiful snow.”

Every snow-flake is a thought of God, its whiteness and purity reminding of Him whose name is Holy, and admonishing us to let our thoughts be as these bright and shining crystals. “ The pure in heart shall see God.”

“ Still cheerily the chickadee  
Singeth to me on fence and tree ;  
But in my inmost ear is heard  
The music of a holier bird ;  
And heavenly thoughts, as soft and white  
As snow-flakes, on my soul alight,  
Clothing with love my lonely heart,  
Healing with peace each bruised part,

Till all my being seems to be  
Transfigured by their purity."

The season carries us back to childhood, when the first snow-storm was a heaven full of angels. There is a story of a lady who went South out of the reach of snow, lived there for many years, and at last came North again. When the first snow fell, after her return, she ran out to meet it with all the delight of a child, caught a flake in her hand, and kissed it. Every crystal sparkled with the joys of childhood. It was filled with early memories. Who can walk the street and witness the delight of children with their sleds and snow-balls; who can look upon the snow-images that their glad fingers have made, without thinking of the time when he himself was rich with the "treasures of the snow"? And, though long years with their lights and shadows stretch between, though Winter's winding-sheet has season after season wrapped the graves of our early playmates

and the wise counsellors of our youth, yet, with memories of our childhood and of home, the snows of to-day bring back forgotten blessings and loving admonitions! May these influences reassert their power, and hold us to honor and virtue! Wordsworth sings, "And yet I know, where'er I go, that there hath passed away a glory from the earth." For us, may the vanished glory come back, borne by the messengers of the snow, and with it the vanishing counsels of those who loved us!

I wonder whether there is not another message the snow-flakes whisper as they come into our faces? Do they not bid us remember the poor? Do they not remind us of the saying of Jesus, "The poor ye have always with you?" Do they not suggest that picture of judgment in which, after recounting the deeds of kindness wrought by the righteous, Jesus says, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it

unto me?" Is there not some such word as this brought by the white-winged messengers from the sky? While the snow may remind us that one part of pure religion and undefiled, before God and the Father, is to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, it reminds of the other also, "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,"—those to whom Winter means privation and suffering.

Church festivals come and go; but whatever public religious service we attend, we may well add to it always, so far as each is able, a private service,—of some substantial kind. It is related that in an English village a poor man, who had a large family, gave them a very comfortable support while he was in health. He broke his leg, however, and was laid up for some weeks. It was proposed to hold a prayer-meeting at his house, and the meeting was led by a Deacon Brown. A loud knock at the door interrupted the service. A lank, blue-frocked youngster stood at the door,

with an ox-goad in his hand, and asked to see Deacon Brown. "Father could not attend this meeting," said the boy, "but he sent his prayers; and they are out in the cart." They were brought in in the shape of potatoes, beef, pork, and corn. That meeting broke up without a formal benediction.

There is one thought more. A friend sent me from Oakland, a day or two ago, some flowers that were plucked in his garden while our section of the earth was white.

It looks sometimes as if our Northern snow killed the flowers. But it is not so. In its gracious mantle, that we sometimes liken to a shroud, it folds the roots and germs of the grasses and flowers, keeping them safe and warm till the glad trumpets of Spring sound the resurrection, when they come forth to newness of life.

"We speak of the snow," says Collyer, "as an image of death. It may be that; but it hides the everlasting life away under its

robe,— the life to be revealed in due time, when all cold shadows shall melt away before the ascending sun, and we shall be, not unclothed, but clothed upon, and mortality shall be swallowed up of life.”

DOWN TO THE LAKE.

In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says,— he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me. Not the sun or the Summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight; for every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of the mind, from breathless noon to grimmest midnight.

—Emerson.

I care not, Fortune, what you me deny ;  
You cannot rob me of free Nature's grace,  
You cannot shut the windows of the sky  
Through which Aurora shows her brightening  
face.

—Thomson.

Stranger, if thou hast learned a truth which needs  
No school of long experience, that the world  
Is full of guilt and misery, and hast seen  
Enough of all its sorrows, crimes and cares  
To tire thee of it, enter this wild wood  
And view the haunts of Nature. The calm shade  
Shall bring a kindred calm, and the sweet breeze,  
That makes the green leaves dance, shall waft a balm  
To thy sick heart.

—Bryant.

## DOWN TO THE LAKE.

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ONE of the most interesting characters in the New Testament is Peter. In spite of his faults and follies, we love him,—for there was much genuine manhood beneath his rough and sea-beaten exterior. Impulsive in his denial, he was prompt in his repentance. The look of his Lord, falling upon his soul like a sunbeam upon a frozen stream, melted him to tears.

Bundle of contradictions as Peter was, there was in him a strong fibre of good common sense, that shows itself in the incident which suggests this study. It has been truly said, “There is no word in the Gospels of a finer grain than this: ‘Simon Peter said, I go a fishing,’—nor any word of a deeper and

more touching pathos, when you make the word one with the man, and realize the worth there and then of what he resolved to do." He never spoke a grander word in all the years of his after ministry.

Let us recall the circumstances. Jesus had been crucified. They had seen him taken by a howling mob and nailed to the cross. Perhaps they had been near enough to hear the cry of agony that rang out under the portentous skies,—“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!” The light of the life that had guided those poor disciples, that had been their strength and their consolation, had gone out in darkness. They trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel. He had spoken to them of a kingdom; but he died uncrowned, save with the twisted thorns. Every hope is now broken, the foundations of their faith have given way, their dreams of the future have perished. Sorrow fills their breasts, the gloom of

midnight has settled upon their minds. What picture can be more pathetic than that of the disconsolate little group, standing huddled together in silence upon the shores of Tiberias!

I wonder whether we can fully appreciate their circumstances at that moment. Surely not, if we have never been broken, as they were, by doubt and sorrow. But if, from any cause, our spirits have been filled with anguish and darkness, we know! Experience is the same through the centuries. Human life has not changed very much. Outwardly, there have been changes. In the appliances of life improvements have been made. For instance, we probably have better fishing-boats than Peter had. But our hearts, with their joys and hopes and loves and sorrows, are very like the hearts that, in bitter and starless disappointment, ages ago, mourned a murdered leader and a buried cause.

I was riding with a friend a while ago; and, as we drove along the country roads

fringed with grass and wild flowers, over-arched by the branches of wayside trees, he told me of a great calamity that had befallen a young man whom he loved. This young man had been brought up in one of the very straitest sects, had been taught the old ideas of God, Man, the Bible, human destiny. He firmly believed them, and was resting upon them. But by and by he found a flaw somewhere. He became unsettled. The opinions in which he had been reared no longer satisfied him. Honesty compelled him to cast them off. But he had been taught to identify them with the realities of life and religion, and knew nothing beyond. He had nothing better upon which to build. He felt convinced that, if these views were wrong, there was nothing substantial in religion. There could be no God and no immortal life. The result was that he was plunged from doubt into despair, and even meditated self-destruction.

I know not how it comes that this incident

and the one we have considered from the New Testament became connected in my mind. But there does seem to be a relationship between them. The shock that came to this young man was very like that which came to the disciples when Jesus was crucified. His faith was as firm as theirs had been, his disappointment as great. But what was their resolve? Far nobler than the one toward which he seemed tending. It was reserved for Judas,—in a fit of remorse, not of doubt,—to end his own life. His example was one that no honest disciple seemed inclined to follow.

The silence that wrapped that little group on the shores of Tiberias was at length broken by Simon Peter. His good sense triumphed. He exclaimed, "I go a fishing!" The others answered,—almost mechanically, no doubt,—"That's the best that can be done. We also go with thee!" "All the ways were closed," it has been finely said,

"save that which led down to the beach and the boat." There was no other direction in which they could go, there was nothing else to do. So down to the lake they went.

We can imagine what they thought: "Our principalities and kingdoms have vanished. The twelve thrones for which we hoped are not to be erected. No more of these rosy visions. He upon whose promise we relied has gone. Our old occupation is all that is left."

The world was very empty to those poor Galileans, as they trudged over the sands on the lakeshore. It had been so full, so bright, so joyous, but a little while before. For three years they had walked with the Great Teacher. How hard it must have been to go back to the old fishing-smacks from which his voice had summoned them one glad morning,—it seemed ages ago!

Back they went,—down to the lake. There, at least, was something real and tangible.

The lake had not failed them. Whatever change had come over the spirit of their dreams, the waves of Galilee were as blue as ever, and as inviting. There was great refuge from their doubts and distress in the influence of that very lake. Far from the excited city, freed from their own feverish thoughts, they could be rocked, as of old, upon the familiar billows, while the friendly stars looked down in sympathy. Perhaps by the morrow, the coolness of the breeze, the peace of the great deep, and the calm of that lustrous eastern sky, would bring clearer thought to the troubled brain. It is no wonder that, in our own day, so many are leaving the subtleties of metaphysics, the absurdities of theology, the whole realm of profitless speculation, and are devoting their attention to the study of nature.

“One impulse from the vernal wood  
May teach us more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can.”

Even the more superficial influences of nature do much for us. They furnish a perpetual inspiration. We are helped and cheered by outward things more than we know. A drive or a brisk walk in the open air often exorcises the blue demons that at times possess us. A breath of cold regenerates us. Crystals of frost underfoot or dashes of rain in the face exhilarate and inspire. The sluggish pulses are quickened and the brain begins to dance. When the world inside the house looks dark and stupid, the wider horizon beyond city walls will restore us. Like the fabled Antæus, every time we touch the earth our strength is renewed.

Nature somehow infuses herself into us. We catch the spirit of the scene. There is life in the object that gives life to us. Upon how many a one has the mountain bestowed something of its own firmness, the sky something of its own tranquillity! How

many a one has felt his troubles borne away by the rushing stream at his feet, his soul warmed by the shining sun, his courage roused by the rising wind! How many a one has felt the unrest of his spirit speaking itself out in the thunder-storm, leaving his bosom at peace! How many a one has found his hope of immortality strengthened by the opening bud of the returning Spring!

With vividness I recall an experience of my own, at a time when the old foundations of my faith had given way, and the skies were black with clouds of doubt. Walking by the river-bank, I was suddenly startled into the consciousness that Spring was coming back. The snow lay in scattered patches; what remained was rapidly melting away. I noticed for the first time that tiny blades of green were pushing their way up through the grass that was dead and brown. The buds of an alder at my feet were swelling with new life, and the branches of the tree above

me gave promise of returning leaves. The Angel of Resurrection had gone forth and unloosed the graves of Winter. His voice was on the air, saying: "Come forth, O leaf and blossom! Make glad the earth, O birds and flowers!"

I seemed a part of the entire scene, and in some way included in the process of renewal. And I thought: "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against the power of God? Will he who cares for the grass of the field and the birds of the air forsake thee, O thou of little faith? The energy that worketh in nature, the beneficent power that evermore bringeth the triumph of life over the ruins of death, will see to it that out of thy wrecked hopes and ambitions, thy shattered creed, thy ruined past, thou shalt rise to better things, to a nobler and grander life!" The experience was as real as that of Paul on his way to Damascus.

There is a lesson of confidence to be learned

from the stability of nature. The Psalmist looked upon the hills and called them everlasting. To him the earth was established that it could not be moved. The writer of Ecclesiastes beheld one generation after another passing away; but "the earth abideth forever." Says Emerson: "Any distrust in the permanency of laws would paralyze the faculties of man. Their permanency is sacredly respected, and his faith therein is perfect. The wheel-springs of man are all set to the hypothesis of the permanence of nature."

The local disturbance of an earthquake or tornado does not affect the general stability. The incidental shock may, indeed, be needed to preserve the entire system. Somewhere its results maintain the evenness of the balance. The apparent unsettling is the perpetual equilibrium.

The moral effect of this stability, unconsciously penetrating heart and brain from

life's earliest moment, is more powerful than we might concede. It is a part of us. In spite of ourselves, we believe. Protesting that we have faith in nothing, we trust in nature. It is more to us than we can put into words, to feel that, when misfortunes come, and familiar faces no longer brighten our circle, and doubts throw their shadows across the soul, our dear old fields and skies and forests remain. We may feel that everything is going, till we set foot upon the earth and lift up our eyes to the stars. They are still there. They do not desert us. Whatever may fail, "the sunrise never failed us yet." Whatever may be uncertain, the snow-flakes will fly, and the Spring will come, and seed-time and harvest return. From the clamor of tongues, from the conflicts of creeds, from the tossing of doubts, one may take refuge in the thought that the world is established and her order fixed. Here is a foundation which none can dispute. Whoever

builds upon that his temple of thought and hope, will not build in vain.

“For nature ever faithful is  
To such as trust her faithfulness.  
When the forest shall mislead me,  
When the night and morning lie,  
When sea and land refuse to feed me,  
'Twill be time enough to die ;  
Then will yet my Mother yield  
A pillow in the greenest field,  
Nor the June flowers scorn to cover  
The clay of their departed lover.”

Down to the lake that company of early Christian disciples went. But there was something more than the lake and its influence. There was work to do. Whatever was true or untrue about their fancied kingdom, the homely tasks of every-day life were left. There were their humble duties. There could be no mistake about these.

Many people have censured Peter and his comrades for that resolution; have called them unspiritual, and said that they might better have held a day of fasting and prayer,

or gone to searching the old records and prophecies for light. But, in spite of all censure, that was a most manly and sensible resolve. Their brains were too puzzled for study. What solution there was for the doubts and fears of those disciples must come to them along the path of duty.

And so it transpired. After that night of toil, there dawned for them through the morning twilight, upon the Sea of Galilee, a vision fairer than the sun.

For you and me also must the beatific vision rise upon seas of toil, in the midst of common duties!

When asked what I would say to such a young man as the one I have mentioned in an earlier portion of this essay,—the one to whom nothing seemed settled and all was despair,—I replied: “I should say to him honestly and fairly, My brother, I do not know any more about most of these questions than you do. There are ten thousand things

that we never can settle in this world. We know absolutely nothing about them. They must always remain matters of speculation. I have some very definite but very simple beliefs, and what I regard as some very strong reasons for them. I could tell you those, but you must reach your own conclusions at last. They must be wrought out, not according to what books say, but out of experience and life. Be in no haste to reach them. Opinions must form slowly. Do not fear that God is in a hurry to have you reach such and such beliefs. Do not think of him as forever holding before you a catechism, whose questions and answers you must master before he is pleased with you. Above all things, he wants perfect sincerity. You must begin upon very common ground to build your character, and through that your creed. Let us leave, for the moment, God and immortality quite out of the question. Perhaps they are too vague to be grasped at

first by an inquiring mind. We know that there are such facts as ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and ‘love’ and ‘truth’ and ‘justice’ and ‘duty.’ They represent what, a thousand times, you and I have felt to be realities. Let us start with these. Here, at least, we are upon solid ground. Here the foundations are firm. When we get lost in the cloud-lands of speculation, let us come right down to the earth, and look for something to do: some humble duty it may be, but let us do it. I do not know what business we have to go soaring through the heavens when we are neglecting all that we ought to do upon the earth. We are here and now. Let us find our work and attend to it. If you do not see very far ahead of you, go just as far as you see and no farther; and do not fret about the rest of the journey until you have taken the step that is plain. Do the duty that lies nearest your hand. It may be writing a neglected letter; it may even be

wiping the pen after the letter has been written. If you see nothing before you but wiping the pen, do that, and your next duty will become instantly clearer. Thus are we brought from the infinities and eternities, with their fathomless mysteries, to the homely little duty we *do* understand, and by whose performance the great Father leads us one step forward in a pathway that shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

After this fashion, I would speak to that young man, or to any one in a similar condition.

It might do him no good. It might seem altogether contemptible, such talk as that. Yet I believe it is the only course to pursue for those who are distracted with ceaseless and fruitless speculation. In the classic fable, when Theseus entered a vast labyrinth, his only escape was by means of a silken thread, one end of which he held between thumb and finger in the darkness, while

the other end was grasped by a friendly hand at the mouth of the cave. Had he lost that thread, his condition would have been hopeless.

We have a thread whose strands are morality and duty. If we hold it firmly, it will lead us out of every cavern of darkness, into light.

This is the only safe and wise way. Whoever is questioning whether there be a God may be sure that he will not find him by wandering away from his own work. He is revealed there in that very work and in the higher qualities of the workman. If a man does not find this life worth living, why should he be so eager for another? He who finds the highest and best there is in this life has strongest assurance that he will live on beyond the horizon. He who pursues this course is in the line of God's purpose. That woven cord of morality and duty takes high hold upon the eternal throne. God

himself is leading the man who holds by the other end; and slowly, but surely, that man is making his way onward and upward.

Riding in the cars a few days ago, between Fort Wayne and Chicago, I fell in with a plain-looking man, who said, in a very honest way, "I do not believe much in the theology of the churches; but I believe in doing good to my neighbors and being kind to my family!" Then he added, "Do you know, sir, I went away from home to be gone several days longer, and there is no reason for my returning just now; but the fact is, I want to see my baby boy! He took it very hard when I came away, and I want to get back to him just as soon as I can!" The little fingers had hold of his heart-strings and were drawing him hundreds of miles.

I thought of two old and familiar texts: "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of him,"—that is, of God. He may not appreciate God clearly enough to acknowledge

him, but the life of God is in every righteous man. This also: "He that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God,"—knoweth him in reality, though not, it may be, by name.

I cannot doubt, however, that somewhere and sometime every such soul will sing:

"I am at rest,  
Since I have understood  
God is, and he is good.

"No more my strength  
In idle search is spent ;  
Its secret is content.

"'Tis mine to do  
What God reveals each day ;  
I joy as I obey.

"I am at rest,  
Because the love divine  
Enfolds this life of mine ! "

Wise old Simon Peter, we are much indebted! You cut but a sorry figure in that sad denial. You were over bold and boisterous when you affirmed your loyalty and promised to stand by your Master alone,

if all the rest should forsake him. But we forgive it all, as he forgave you then. Better than the agony of tears that followed swiftly upon the heels of your sin was your noble resolve upon the shores of Galilee, when you said, "I go a fishing," and led your dispirited comrades down to the lake and the fishing-boats. It was wise, O Peter, to go back to nature and to work. Noble was it for you, and all those other poor distracted minds, to leave the ruins of broken hope and faith for the certain and unmysterious duties of common life.

May we be brave and wise ourselves! In times of doubt and uncertainty may we enter whatever gateway is open, perform whatever task lies nearest our hand! And may there, at length, arise upon us, as upon Peter, a greater and brighter light,—a light that shall swallow up our darkness and make glad our weary hearts!



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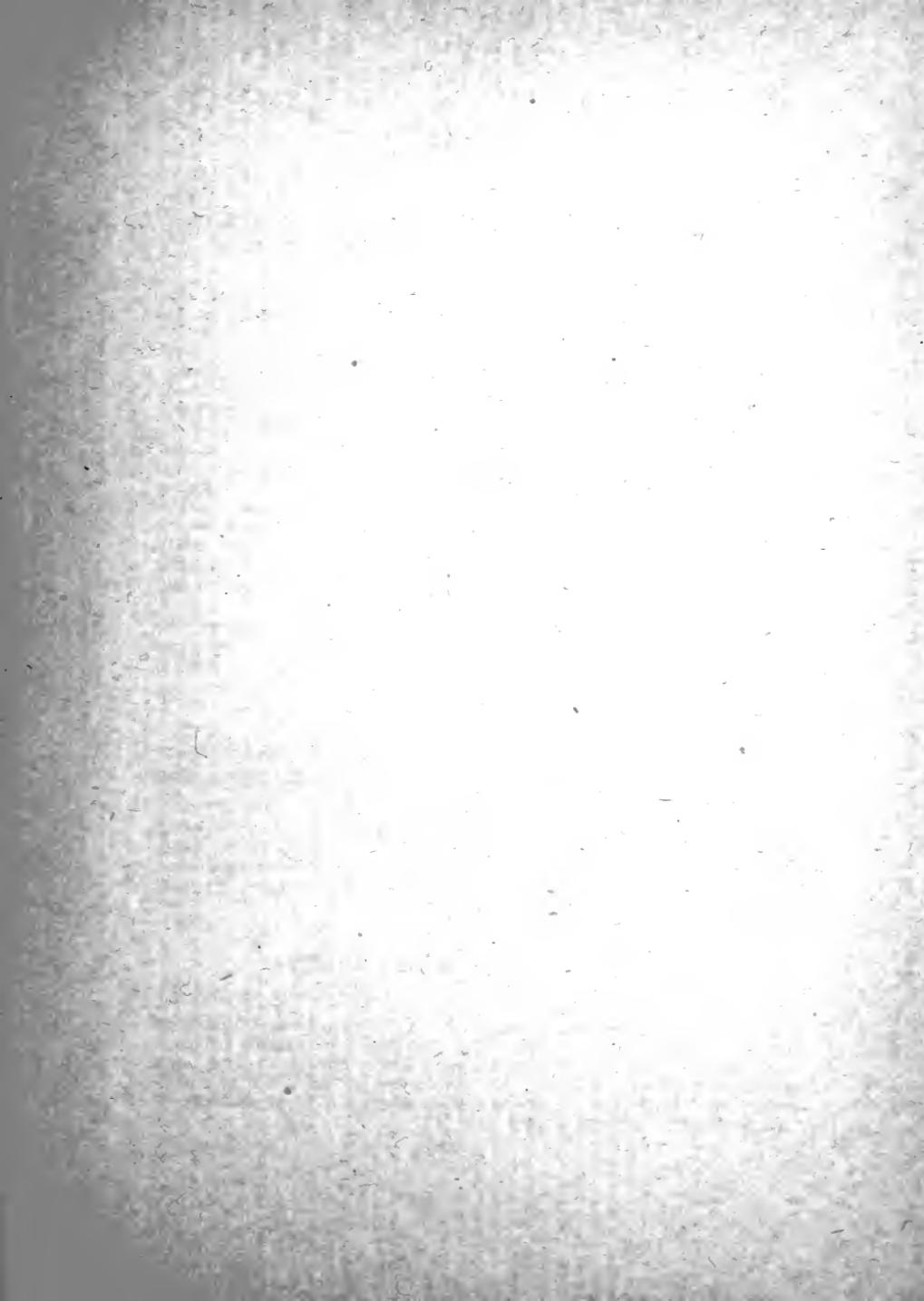
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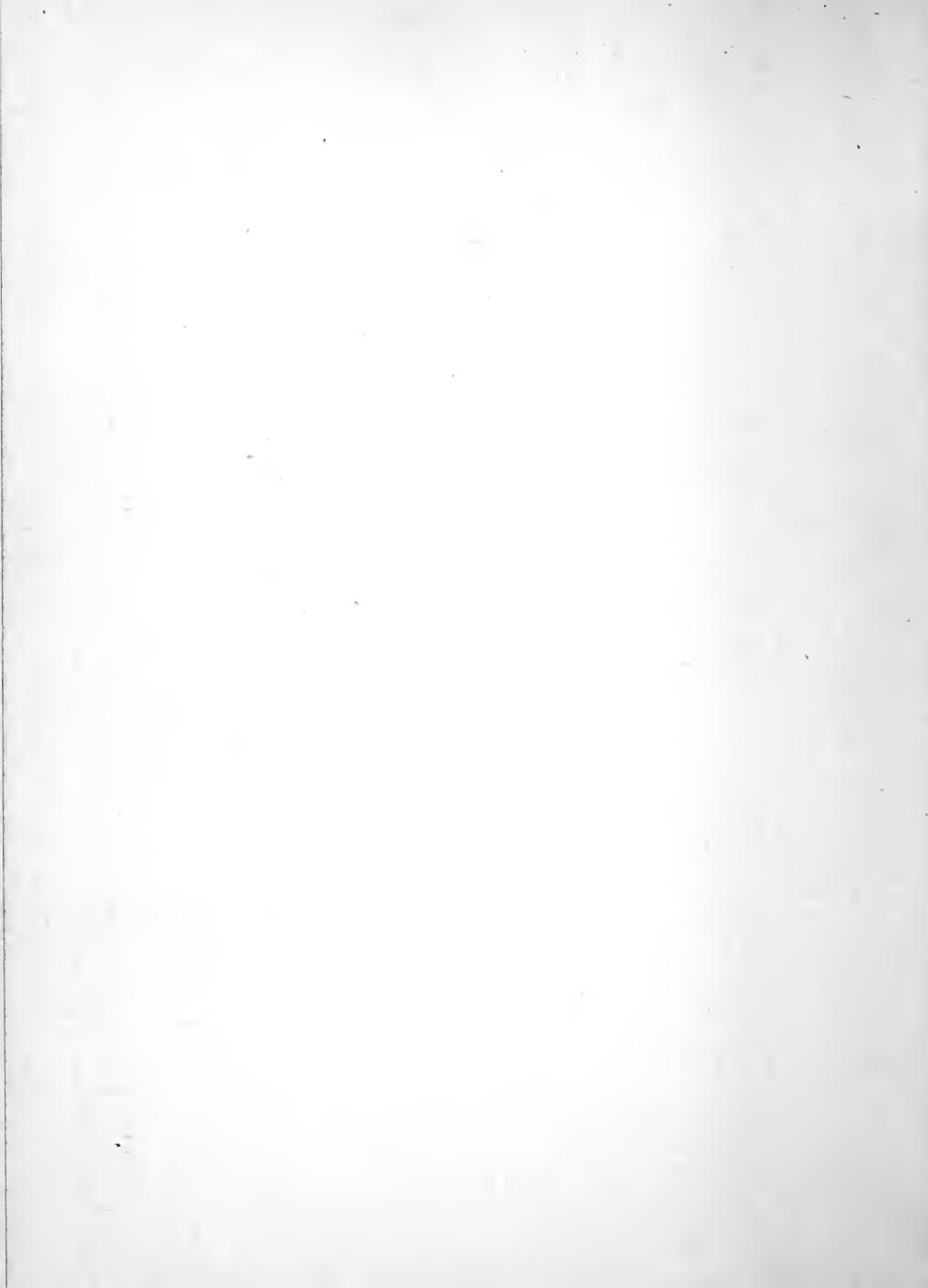
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